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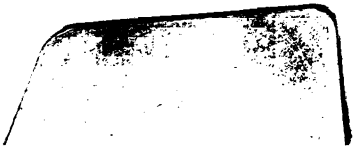
With Star and Grass

Anna Spencer Twitchell



Twitchell

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WITH STAR AND GRASS

With Star and Grass

By

Anna Spencer Twitchell

The Cornhill Publishing Company

Boston

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TO D.

I sought Love over the world
In countries far—
Out on strange highways
I followed the wind,
I followed a bird,
I followed a star.

I sought Love over the world
Till I weary grew,
Then I followed my heart
And it led me
Home to you.

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WITH STAR AND GRASS

THE WIFE

He sees the wife from slim, young comeliness,
With bearing of his children and their care,
Grow stooped and withered and the shining hair
That was his pride grow thin and lusterless.
Day after day, with wordless, pained distress
He strives to ease the load her shoulders bear,
Lifting a burden here, a burden there,
Or offering some clumsy, rare caress.
But ah! her girl-face never was so fair,
And eyes and lips that answered his desire
Are limned with sacred meaning to him now.
To his rapt sight an angel might aspire
To claim the stature of her soul, or wear
The halo that surrounds her mother-brow.

WITH STAR AND GRASS

As old I am as that white, throbbing star,
  Young as these herbs of Spring that quickly pass—
My soul goes up the pathway of the star,
  My feet go down the pathway of the grass.

BEREFT

Oh, brown Earth, warm and fragrant,
Make soft her tiny bed,
Oh, great Winds, in the darkness
Move gently overhead—

Be kind, you waving grasses
She gathered baby-wise,
And all you buds and blossoms
Rest lightly on her eyes.

Oh, mothers, to your bosoms
Fold close and safe your own—
My little babe is sleeping
Beneath the stars...alone.

TO A MOUNTAIN PINE

O lonely pine
Upon your granite cliff,
I know your pain—
Tossing your weird arms
To the mighty winds,
Beating your ragged breast
With shrunken hands.
I know your pain,
For I have stood
On such high, dawn-kissed peaks

And flung my arms
And beat with futile hands,
Because I still was held
To stone and clod
By sullen roots
Of unremembered lives.

FROM A LONELY HEARTH

You used to search the sky with serious eyes
As though with clearer vision you would see
Beyond the hovering night clouds and the stars
What heaven might be.

And now, Beloved, do you ever turn
From new-found raptures and celestial sights,
Seeking, sometimes, with wide and wistful gaze
The dear home lights?

NEW FIRES

When every brook is mute and frozen lie
The patient fields, and hushed is melody,
I am content with books or some old friend
Who will not stir my pulse nor quicken me.

But when the Year lights green fires in the glade,
When young grass starts and birds are sweet above,
I cry "Halloo" to Pan, and hand in hand
We range the high hills calling unto Love.

FROM A CLOISTER

Sweet Mary, I have turned my face from life,
My heart is empty and my lips unkissed—
And often does my soul cry out for all
That I have missed.

Sometimes these wrappings seem but cerements,
Sometimes these beads are cold, these prayers are dead,
And, oh, a cross lies heavy where should lie
The little head.

RESURRECTION

No tomb shall weight me down, no dark grave close
Me from the light within its narrow cell—
The winds I love these ashes shall dispel,
To mingle with the myriads of those
Long turned to dust.—But when Spring's magic shows,
When sweet grass starts and buds begin to swell,
Lo, thou shalt find me in the lily's bell,
Lo, I shall wake and blossom with the rose.
With the first throb of unseen mystery,
Wooing to miracle the senseless clod,
With the first subtle thrill of ecstasy,
With the first quivering note of melody,
This heart shall quicken with the quickening sod,
Part of the very beating heart of God.

SONG

I have wings today—I can fly,
I am quickened with ecstasy,
I am part of the shining song
Of the brook and tree.

Love has given me wings and song,
He has clasped and touched me with flame,
And never shall dawn break as before,
Nor starlight look the same.

ROSES

Across the garden space
A perfume blows—
I know the darkness holds,
Somewhere, a rose.

The garden of my dreams
Is fragrant, too,
And as night holds the rose
My heart holds you.

KINDERGARTEN

I watched the children today
Fitting blocks together
In simple patterns
I had set for them.

And as I leaned above
The small, restless bodies,
And saw the flushed faces
Drawn into serious, unaccustomed lines,
I longed to set the patterns
Right for them, myself,
With a few deft touches,
And send the babies out to play
In the orchard,
To shout and dance,
And catch the falling petals
In their soft, rosy palms.

Oh, God,
Do You never long
To set the patterns right
For stumbling fingers,
And send Your children
To play on the hills
Before the day is done?

THE ASPEN

Straight and slender
Is the young Aspen
Upon the mountain-side,
Aloof and shining,
White like a maiden,
Mystery is about her,
She sways to a heavenly music.

The Wind comes as her lover:
He whispers softly,
All her pale, silken leaves rustle
With vague, amorous yearnings,
Feeling his breath upon her bosom.
But when, boldly, he would make her his,
She holds back his ardor
With slim, protesting hands.

ALONE

Well I remember that bleak day of snow,
Of sullen skies and searching, angry winds—
How my stern father came and held me up,
Too small a child to see you as you lay.
How from the chill aloofness of your smile,
And from your form so strangely still I turned,
Half-comprehending, suddenly desolate,
And hid my face against his breast and yearned
For some belated hint of tenderness.
But, coldly, as his way had ever been,
He but unclasped, slowly, my clinging arms
About his neck, and led me, shrinking, in
Among the funeral guests.

And even now
That early loss comes crying at my heart:
I stand again the timid, wistful child,
Bewildered, in my ugly dress of black,

Among the whispering neighbors, and I feel
Again the curious, prying eyes—And you...
In the long box...helpless to comfort me.

THE VAGRANT

My heart it will not stay at home
Contentedly and rest,
My heart it will not fold its wings
Within the quiet nest—

But still goes crying after dreams
Unreal and pale as foam...
Oh, foolish heart, to follow dreams
When you have Love at home!

THE URGE

Through countless ages mute and still
  Abode that tiny spark from God,
Unmoved, insensate, with no will
  Nor impulse above rock and clod.

For other ages long, it wore
  The humble guise of grass and tree,
Of tender bud and bloom, before
  It found its earth-bound roots were free.

It heard, it saw, it woke, it slept,
A sentient thing it called and cried—
It swam, it flew, it crawled, it crept,
It mated, bore its kind and died.

Through aeons slowly wrought the vast
Unfoldment of that mighty plan...
Savage but upright, stood at last
The uncouth semblance of a man.

How long, how infinitely long,
Before the embryo soul was born,
To thrill to flower and sea and song,
To note the stars, to greet the morn!

And with what resurrections bought,
And by what purging of desires,
Behold the creature of His thought
That, god-like, to the heights aspires.

THE CHOSEN

Upon a radiant summer day
Young Love in glory came my way,
His wings so dazzling in the light
Mine eyes were blinded with the sight.
"Come, lay thy hand in mine, dear maid,
And go thou with me, unafraid;
Whatever thy desire is thine,

If thou but pledge thy heart to mine:
For thee life's honeyed cup," he said,
"The daily banquet richly spread,
And learn how I have loved thee, Sweet,
Who lay my kingdom at thy feet—
Gold, jewels, lands, all thine—Wilt go?"—
I hid my face and answered "No."

When white the drifts of winter lay,
One desolate and dreary day
Came Love to me once more and said:
"I have no place to rest my head,
And often bitter is the cup
And dry the crust from which I sup.
No gift, no promise do I bring,
This only is my offering:
A cross which thou must share with me,
A road whose end no man may see;
Bruised feet and broken wings—Wilt go?"—
And I went with him through the snow.

WHEN HE COMES HOME

When he comes home again! I fashion o'er
The hundred tender things that I shall say,
How I shall count the dragging hours all day,
And when he comes shall hear his step before
The old gate clicks, and meet him at the door,
And help him with his shabby coat and lay,

Half-tearfully, the much-brushed hat away,
And the stout cane he leans on more and more.
When he is seated in his own big chair,
That in his absence was so eloquent,
As pleased as any child he'll tell me then
About his visit, how each day was spent,
Adding the while I stroke the soft, gray hair—
"But nothing's quite like getting home again!"

THE DAY LOVE CAME

The day Love came I did not know his face,
So kindly grave it was, so calm the glance
From under level brows, I thought I looked
On Friendship's countenance.

The day Love came I did not know his voice,
Since it was but a voice familiar grown,
That all my years, in any hour of need,
Had answered to my own.

The day Love came I did not know his touch,
So cool and light the clasp he offered me;
It caused no leap of hot blood to my heart,
No sudden ecstasy.

The day Love came I did not know his kiss,
Who only felt it softly on my hair,
When I had thought his burning lips would find
My lips, and set it there.

The day Love came there was no miracle,
No rapture and no flame of passion. Nay...
Too late I knew him for that faithful heart
I miss...so much...today.

A BROKEN LUTE

A broken lute, my heart! When tenderly
You touched it first to answering harmony,
How little dreamed we that your hand would wring
Such later discord from each tortured string.

But once too oft the jangling measure woke;
Beneath the strain it thrilling, throbbing, broke,
And even to your long-loved touch is mute.
It answers not—my heart, a broken lute.

THE HAUNTED ROOM

When you proved false, the chamber in my heart
That had been yours so long, that sorry day
I swept and darkened, then I locked the door
And threw the key away.

I thought again to find my former peace,
Knowing that chamber tenantless and bare,
When, lo, as once I passed that shrouded room,
I heard a knocking there.

When you went forth that day at my command,
Unknown within I locked your memory...
I may not enter that sad ghost to lay—
I threw away the key!

BEFORE A DYNAMO

Terrible, unknown power, harnessed and made
Servant to puny man! The city street
Is but an artery where your pulses beat,
Quickening to swifter life the heart of Trade,
Hastening the feet of Progress. By your aid
We conquer now where once we knew defeat.
Light you have given us, and force and heat,
Annihilated time and space, and played
With life and death even as a juggler may
Toss his gilt baubles with a careless hand.
Upon the storm you ride unbridled; here
Where we have chained you, you can but obey,
Straining your bonds vainly, to understand
How you were shackled whom your captors fear.

ASPIRATION

So long the way at times I cannot see
The outline of the peak that beckons me—
So thick the mists and clouds that loom afar,
I often cannot see my guiding star.

Though long the way and hidden be the goal,
Yet mountain-peak and star are there, my Soul.

SONG OF THE DESERT

I stretch my length of burning sand and lie
A-dream beneath the hot blue of the sky,
And mile on mile upon my barren breast,
My yuccas lift in attitude of prayer,
Their slim, white hands into the quiet air,
With cactuses in fiery splendor set
As living jewels in a coronet.

My mysteries have lured the feet of man,
Bones mark the passing of his caravan.
Tragedies are my mile-posts, everywhere
Pointing the shriveled finger of despair...
Arid, untamed, yet in my bosom deep
The hopes of unborn generations sleep.

MOTHER-HEART

Not in the throes of her maternity,
Nor when his first cry pierced her consciousness;
Not when he drew his life with soft caress
From her white breast; not in the hour when he
Essayed her arms' safe shelter totteringly,
Nor when a dark day left him fatherless;
Not when she hid from him her heart's distress,
And gave her years to watchful ministry...
But when, man-grown, he brought her shame and
woe,

And came, a broken thing, to her once more,
Soiled, sodden, seemingly devoid of good;
'Twas then that, feeble, her gray head bowed low,
Yet mutely yearning over him she bore,
She tasted her full cup of motherhood.

A WATER COLOR

It hangs above my desk in home-made frame;
You trace the sprawling letters of the name,
"A California Sunset," and you smile,
And comment on the unknown artist's "style"!

Listen.—Her way like many more was laid
In the gray places—less in sun than shade,
Less in the brightness than the chilling rain,
Less in the paths of pleasure than of pain.
The short, hot summers brought the drought each year,
The blighted crops, the pastures brown and sere.
She saw no pleasant stretch of river shore,
No trees, no grass, no flowers were round her door.
In a hard land where each new day could bring
But thankless tasks, she toiled unquestioning.
And through the months of barren wintryness,
With life as dreary and as colorless,
Day after day through those slow-footed hours,
She stilled her soul with dreams of birds and flowers:

She saw the sunset warm upon the sky,
She saw it on the brooding mountains lie;
She saw an ocean bathed in tender light,
And flowers folded-petalled for the night—
Until the stumbling fingers, apt in naught
But round of homely duties, and untaught
In what the world calls art, in some swift rush
Of scarce defined emotion, seized the brush,
And painted there upon the back-ground rude,
With trembling strokes and colors dull and crude,
Painted in rapture, painted lovingly,
Her dream of mountain and of sunset sea.
Great thoughts within her moved her through and through,
As haltingly the little picture grew,
And those stiff fingers, struggling to express,
Made every stroke tender as a caress.
What that a child's cheap paints were all she had,
What that the tints were poor, the drawing bad?
The blur of color and unsightly lines
Glow all transformed when once the heart divines...

And so the little daub hangs there today—
The paints and brush long since were laid away;
Quiet at length the restless heart and hand—
And one might smile...who did not understand.

THE HARP

She seems to me like some quaint instrument,
  That, warped and scarred, is mellowed with the years,
  Attuned to long-dead hopes and smiles and tears,
Dim as the attic where its days are spent—

That yet, with every quivering nerve a-thrill
  Speaks at the touch of skillful hands across
  The tarnished strings, through change, decay and loss
Responsive to the master-fingers still.

AFTER PARTING

I have not let him know my love
Nor put its rapture in a song,
But with stern guard on eyes and lips
I have been strong.

I have shut out his prayers and turned
Blindly from his dear arms and kiss—
Oh, I have found, some way, somehow,
Courage for this...

Oh, road whereon he lonely walks,
Oh, sailing moon, a silver rim,
Oh, winds and clouds and stars, tonight
Be kind to him.

GETHSEMANE

Quiet but sleepless all the night she lies,
The while the little clock ticks noisily
The passing moments to eternity.
She watches for the dawn with straining eyes,
Feeling the first, faint thrill within her rise,
Fore-runner of the miracle to be—
Her hour with God on woman's Calvary.
Her untried soul for strength and courage cries
To face the unknown perils of the day,
When that frail flesh in pain is crucified.—
Wide-eyed, she sees the brooding darkness flee
At dawn's approach, and mutely strives to pray,
While he sleeps on unheeding at her side,
This bitter night of her Gethsemane.

SONGS

The songs I sang before you came, beloved,
Were such as youth sings, confident and clear,
Lightly from thoughtless lips and untried heart
For all to hear.

Since love has touched me and with other eyes
I read new meaning now in everything,
My lips are strangely mute, and only God
Can hear me sing.

REVELATION

So calm she is, so nun-like is her mien,
Pale lips and placid brow and banded hair—
Aloof and coldly white and passionless
As those who dwell within the cloister's air.

But once I saw her for a mad breath's span
Unguarded, with the mask she wears laid by,
And for a tortured moment in her eyes,
Something that begged for death but could not die.

"LONG LIVE THE KING!"

"The King is dead!—Long live the King!"
They cried as they crowned his son.
The dead king smiled in his awful peace
As they hailed the other one.

The son stood straight in youth and strength
While they placed the heavy crown,
And gave him the scepter that yesterday
The dead laid gladly down.

Brave and fair stood the slender lad
And never a sign he gave,
Though none knew better than he, they fixed
The gyves upon a slave.

THE HANDS

I sing the hands of Labor:
The unskilled hands that smite and break and hew,
That cut and dig and draw and cleave,
That blast and delve and heave and dredge;
The sinewy, roughened, horny hands,
The seamed and maimed and knotted hands,
Begrimed and stained and worn—
All the patient, faithful, burden-bearing hands of the world.

I sing the hands of Labor:
The uncouth, virile, hairy hands of men,
With dead dreams in their eyes, and in their hearts
The burnt-out embers of dead altar fires.
The sodden days lie heavy on their souls
As sodden nights weight down their heavy lids.
Could dreams and sacred fires be meant for such as these?

I sing the hands of Labor:
Unlovely hands with fingers blunt and shapeless,
The red and coarsened hands of women,
The women with no time for motherhood
Beyond the bearing of the listless babes
Conceived of pale, anemic passion in sordid intervals
Between the hopeless days.

I sing the hands of Labor:
The hands of youths and maids who come with lagging feet
In the endless procession of workers,
With heavy, sullen features
And old, wistful eyes that question life.

I sing the hands of Labor:
The pitiful, thin hands of little children,
God's little children, robbed of love and laughter,
And cheated of their playtime;
Thrust from their cradles by the greed of men
Into the ranks of toilers,
To sip of knowledge from a poisoned cup,
And learn the beautiful truths of their bodies
From lecherous lips;
Baby hands, fashioned for kisses,
That, still warm from the meager breasts of gaunt mothers,
Are schooling themselves to patience and cunning
At tedious tasks.

I sing the hands of Labor:
The bony, bloodless, withered hands,
The feeble, faltering, palsied hands,
The tragic hands of the uncherished old,
So soon to drop the tangled threads of life,
And lay the blurred, unsightly pattern by.

I sing the hands of Labor—
All the patient, faithful, burden-bearing hands of the world....
Christ's tears will wash the scars from these poor hands.

SEPULTURE

They have laid by their outworn vestures, all
The hosts we call the dead.
They rot in wormy shrouds or moulder in
The catacombs,
Or dragged from ravished tombs
They grin at us from painted stalls,
Brown, shrunken mummies
Swathed in yellowed bands....
When I shall wing my way among the stars,
In perfect tune, at last, with God's great plan,
Perchance I shall not care what fate befell
The frayed robe of my soul.
And yet this seems more fit
Than charnel damps and slow decay:
That darting fingers of the sure, swift flame
Shall ravel out its twisted stuff,
And slender fingers of the winds of heaven
Weave it in cloud, or bear it where
The next sweet spring may make it into flowers.

THE UNDESIRED

An unloved burden carried through the weary
months...
Another babe,
Unwelcome, undesired,
To drink the bitter milk
From a reluctant, meager breast,
To suck in with the scant, thin stream
The poison bred of loathing
And the hot shame
Of motherhood defiled;
To come in time to know the look of gray despair
In the dull eyes,
The sullen resignation
Of the spiritless, broken thing
That suffers numbly with no outward sign.

Nothing of joy in that life at her heart,
Nothing of sweet, dear planning, holy awe
For the great miracle of love made flesh;
No high inheritance of dreams,
No warm and yearning arms—
Only the mother-cry of agony,
And the worn face that looks...and turns away.

HER HANDS

Not white nor soft, her hands, nor tapering—
Uncared for, rough, with red, work-coarsened skin;

No gems they boast, but long by time worn thin
As pledge of wifehood, just one plain band ring,
Their sole adornment through the years has been.
Such willing hands, alert for anything
Of service, for the daily tasks that bring
Nor thanks nor praise; the same dull round within
The house, of toil and grind the grim years send.
Such patient, tender hands, so swift to ease,
So strong to minister in hours that try
The tortured soul.—Ah, it is hands like these,
Faithful and burden-bearing to the end,
We miss—God help us!—when they folded lie.

THE OLD FATHER

Last evening I came on him, unaware,
His shabby, old straw hat upon his knee,
The good, stout stick he leans on, easily
Within his reach beside his big arm-chair;
Aureoled by the whiteness of his hair,
The gentle face a-light with memory,
The faded, blue eyes wistful, as we see
A child's that begs an answer to its prayer.
And almost I could see her lean to rest
Her lips upon his forehead, and to lay
Her soft, old cheek to his, then poised for flight,
Laugh back at him, till captive on his breast
She took his kiss. There in the failing light
I left him to his dreams, and stole away.

LOSS

My dream it was a soaring bird,
Lured to his hand and will—
Its flight is done that in the dust
Lies broken-winged and still.

My love it was the boon he begged,
An opening rose of red,
But ah, his breath has withered it—
And now the rose is dead.

WAR MOTHER'S LULLABY

Lullaby—lullaby—
Camest from my heart to lie
With the cold ground for a bed,
And no roof above thy head.
Hunger, fear and misery
Sapped my life and cheated thee,
And this shrunken breast is dry—
Lullaby—lullaby.

In the darkness and the rain,
Cradled where the dead have lain,
Cradled on the verge of hell—
Through the scream of shot and shell
God can never hear thy cry—
Lullaby—lullaby.

Lullaby—lullaby—
Country!—but the price is high!
Thy young brothers fair and brave,
And thy father—all, I gave.
All of suffering I know...
Long my tears have ceased to flow...
Hush—'tis not so hard to die—
Lullaby—lullaby.

TWO

I gave them flesh and brought them by
The narrow gate of pain;
I suckled them, I worked for them,
I saw them both attain

Young manhood's growth.—And then I said:
"Now they will care for me,
And happy years at length shall bring
Their sons about my knee."

Then came the war...I gave them both...
I saw them march away...
As though they had not ever been
I am alone today.

One fell... The other? by the fire
He sits, or in the sun,
His mind forever shattered by
The horror of Verdun.

He stares and stares with vacant eyes
And whispers all the while...
And I had rather see him dead
Than see his awful smile.

WINGS

So weak and small, so shaken with the gusts
Of sorry passions, bound by earthly things,
So given to futile fears and vague mistrusts—
Yet have we wings!

The love that lifts and shares another's woe,
The upward reaching thought, the dream that sings,
Unselfish prayers that rise to heaven—lo,
These are our wings.

As nestlings in their first flights strive and yearn,
Testing their powers with feeble flutterings
And timid trials, so at last we learn
To use our wings!

MOURNERS

They look with curious eyes to see me smile
And take my task up with unfaltering hand—
Who, knowing you, yet donned a garb of black,
Could never understand.

They sit within the dim and breathless house,
And feed their grief with white-lipped questioning,
While just without, the garden that you loved
Grows fragrant with the Spring.

EPITAPH

This shattered chalice
Held thy wine
Of life—
Its end is served.

Tomorrow
Thou shalt fill
Another cup,
Nor know that thou
Didst ever drink before.

LOVE'S GIFTS

Love plucked a flower for me
One happy day,
But the flower was a joy that paled
And passed away.

Love gave me a jewel fair
While his eyes caressed,
But the gem was a hope that died
Within my breast.

Love fashioned a crown and brought
As offering—
A grief which the years have made
A holy thing.

OH, THROUGH WHAT GROPING LIVES—

Within that shambling, uncouth shape I wore,
Something unborn stirred faintly.—From the clod
The sullen glance was raised, the face grotesque
Lifted with some vague impulse toward God....

Oh, through what groping lives, what paths of pain,
What tossing tides my faltering soul must stem,
Oh, through what mysteries have I come, Beloved,
To kneel at last and kiss your garment's hem.

COMPENSATION

The years have taken all I had:
Swift senses, supple grace,
Gold from my hair, light from my eyes,
The roses from my face.

The years have taken all I had:
Now they shall give to me,
Who from their hands in one keen breath
Take immortality.

FIVE TODAY

Five years old today! ah, my sweet, I see
What a great big girl you have grown to be.
The ringlets that clustered your baby brow
Hang in curls quite down to your shoulders now;
You are tall for your years—a little maid
With serious eyes that are unafraid;
You speak with a quaint little lisp the while,
And bless me—you've stolen your daddy's smile!
You are slender and straight of limb, and light
Of step as the fairies that dance by night,
And your merry laugh is so sweet and clear
I fancy its echo reaches me here.
Ah, baby, our baby who went away—
Somewhere in heaven you're five today.

IN SPITE OF STORM

The high storms searched me out
Within my barren cleft,
But as the mountain Gilia,
Tossed and broken by the winds
Will cling by just a thread
Of tenuous root to life
And bear its bloom,
I hold by one frail dream.
The patient years will heal,
And, shapen out of pain,
My soul at last shall lift

A chalice white,
To hold the dew and rain

THE LITTLE HOUSE

I wonder how these pleasant folk,
These kindly folk that neighbor me,
Can pass my gate day after day
And never see—

Can look and nod engrossed in talk
Or business dull and commonplace,
No swift surprise or wonder marked
On any face.

I must believe they only see
A house, a garden fenced and neat,
Apparently like many more
Along the street:

A tiny, unpretentious place
With graveled paths and spreading oak—
Yet Love left paradise for this,
Oh, stupid folk!

OR A MELODY

With the winds of dawn that stir
As the stars grow dim,
Scorning mountains that divide,
I go seeking him.

Though he never know the watch
That my spirit keeps,
Nor my kiss upon his eyes,
Softly, as he sleeps—

Let me steal across his dreams,
Sometimes let me be
As a fragrance or a light
Or a melody

FULFILLMENT

That day, beloved, shall bring joy to some,
To others, grief—to many, life, and lay
Death's shadowy laurels upon waiting brows.
To some it will be just another day.

My heart will know while yet the sky is gray,
When weary men with sleep are drugged and numb,
And quickening before the mists of dawn
My eager soul shall meet you as you come.

MOON-PATH

The pale, young moon slips through my open door,
And weaves a fragile path of mystery—
Fragrant, alluring, one white rose without,
Beckons and nods to me.

Perhaps old dreams shall come with eager feet
A-down that whither-leading way of light...
Perhaps old memories shall stir and wake
And walk with me to-night.

NESTS

I felt the thrill before my eyes could see,
The quickening at the heart of everything,
And lo! while yet I marveled, it was Spring,
All palpitant with birth and mystery.
Busy the long day through on tireless wing,
Two sparrows building in a leafing tree,
Drunken with bliss though garbed most quakerly,
Chirped of the rapture that they could not sing.
And I!—I thought me of a country lane,
Where even now the crocuses must be
Jeweling all the starting green again;
And in a wee, brown, snugly-hidden nest,
My eager fancy leaped to clasp her,—she
With our small fledgeling safe upon her breast.

CHILDLESS

Her bosom's tender curves have never been
The pillow for a sleepy baby's head.
She has not brooded by a small, white bed,
With soft, deft mother-touches, tucking in
A little form. She has not fought to win
Through racking hours, uncheered, uncomforted,

A hopeless bout with death, nor anguished shed
Her holy tears, when first the shape of Sin
Threatened a heart once nourished near her own.—
Within her dim house is no prattling glee,
No littered rooms, no sound of eager feet.
The days are meaningless, and she alone
Can know how her life's flower, shaped perfectly,
Yet slowly withers, barren, incomplete.

THE NEWLY DEAD

I sat beside the newly dead—
Without the trees were bare,
The wind swept in through every crack
Guttering the candles there.

Gaunt branches brushed against the pane—
My dead did never stir;
The wind beat shrieking at the door
But never startled her.

And she who in the crying storm
Would wake with vague alarms,
And shrink and cling and creep at last
For comfort to my arms,

Lay undismayed, so small, so frail,
Composed and quiet—she,
My little bride, so strangely come
To have no need of me.

BEFORE DAWN

When youth was all of life
And shining days were long,
Upon my lips
Love was a song.

When tides were at their full
And pulses hot and high,
Out of my heart
Love was a cry.

And now when with the stars
This sacred hour I share,
Within my soul
Love is a prayer.

THE OLD GRIEF

The quick storm caught us and the beat of rain
  Flashed slanting silver on the wayside dust—
The poppies' startled faces were a stain
  And blur of scarlet against yellow rust.

Beneath the refuge of a friendly tree,
  Within my arms I held you close and warm—
You answered to the first kiss fearlessly,
  And oh, I blessed the miracle of storm!

So keen at heart my unhealed sorrow lies
This still can stir to sudden, throbbing pain,
And bring the swift tears to my anguished eyes:
A country roadside and the breath of rain.

MOUNTAINS

Serene and still each rock-hewn face,
Though storms have left their scars—
They seem to shame my spirit bowed
In dust beneath the stars.

Oh, granite peaks of mystery
And winds' eternal psalm,
If but my heart were stone like yours,
I, too, could be as calm.

AFTER LOSS

For them there still are stars,
And flowers upon the earth,
The zest of dreams and work,
And melody and mirth.

And still are dawn and dusk,
And days of long delight,
And lips that touch and cling,
Of lovers in the night.

For me is only this:
Your grave—a wound still new
Upon a wind-swept hill
That holds my dead heart, too.

IN ABSENCE

Sometimes with an up-leaping heart
I see a shadow fall,
Across a sudden silence
I seem to hear you call:

But when I look it is a cloud
Upon my bit of sky,
And when I listen comes again
Only a wild bird's cry.

I KNOW

Dear Heart, I know what love could mean,
And for that love I long,
Since in my veins is singing fire
And life in me is strong.

Dear Heart, I know what love could mean...
But on my lips I lay
Silence, and only tell to God
The dream I put away.

I WILL SING MY SONGS TO YOU

I will sing my songs to you
Though the miles may part—
Like the love that sends them forth
They will find your heart:

Little songs made white as prayer
And by sorrow blest—
Oh, as I would, if I might,
They will find your breast.

I will sing my songs to you,
And if God shall hear,
He will know—and let them rest
Softly as a tear.

MEN AND TREES

We stand along your avenue
A stately, ordered row—
Important, selfish, silly, vain,
We watch you come and go.

In silent laughter we look on
At all the things you do—
You little dream how, leafily,
We make a jest of you:

Your endless scramble after wealth,
Your malice and your greed,
Your shameful mockery of God,
The bloody wars you breed.

For if we could not turn to jest
The foolish and the bad,
From very horror of your deeds
I think we should go mad.

Oh, we are wiser far than you
In truths and mysteries...
'Tis only feet that make you men,
And roots that make us trees.

GIFTS

When I came down from the mountain trail
I brought three gifts to her:
A feather of cloud,
A wild bird's song
And a wreath of juniper.

When I came again from the mountain trail
I found of the gifts I gave,
The cloud had scattered,
The song was mute,
And the wreath was on her grave.

THE GATE

The wood is stubborn and tough
And the iron is hard and cold—
I cry and I beat upon the Gate
But the great locks hold.

I can beat till my hands are torn,
I can call till I faint for breath—
It closed when the first man lonely passed
To the realm of Death.

LOST—A SOUL

Somewhere in all this confusing
Tangle of objects,
Among the possessions
I have strained and sweated
All my best years
To gather about me—
Somewhere among the crowding ornaments,
Furniture, rugs, brocades,
Cut-glass and silver-plate,
Is the soul I have lost.

In my youth of privation and struggle
It used to brighten
My bare little room.
It wore a shimmering garment of dream

A filet of golden fancies
Bound its brow,
Its eyes held visions.

If anyone chance to see a soul
Grown somewhat fat and sluggish
And careless in attire,
Hugging itself and gloating
In some richly upholstered chair,
Or counting the silver spoons,
It is mine.—I would have it back,
For one needs a soul
If only to keep up appearances.

VIRGIN

I often see her in a quaint, prim gown,
Walking within the shady garden close,
Her faded cheek flushed softly as she bends
Above a rose.

She smiles at happy mothers as they pass
A wistful smile—then slowly turns away,
A lonely figure in a garden where
No children play.

A LATE SPRING

This Spring-time has no laughter in her face;
Her eyes are veiled with shadows and the sweet
Young curve of lips is sorrowful.—The street

That takes on passing beauty from her grace,
Is bleak and cheerless still, a straggling row
Of ugly houses and of naked trees,
And woodland shrines are bare of mysteries,
With empty censers swinging to and fro.—
Reluctantly the line of frost recedes,
Even the songs of birds are less elate,
Even the grass beside the path is thin
And pale between November's faded weeds.
It is as though the Winter held the gate
Half open, through which the tides of life flow in.

THE FORGOTTEN

No song is on my lips
Where song was yesterday—
I wish that I could cry,
I wish that I could pray.

I go with dragging feet
From task to weary task,
My heart is but a stone,
My face is but a mask.

Green fires are on the hill,
A bird calls to its mate,
Love comes with tender strength,
Life beats upon the Gate.

But Love comes not to me,
No surge of life sweeps high—

I wish that I could pray,
I wish that I could cry.

BLIND

I shall not see the budding of the Spring,
I shall not see the Summer's glory pale,
The flash of painted breast and soaring wing,
The poppy's piquant face beside the trail.

All masked for me—the sunny, wind-swept space,
The mists that wrap the valley like a shroud,
The hills where Autumn drapes her orient lace,
The visions limned in lifting smoke and cloud.

Yet not alone nor stricken utterly
Though thrust to sudden darkness and apart—
I have your face and smile in memory,
The wonder of you warm against my heart.

Not all for sorrow marked nor all unblessed:
A sweetness lingers in the bitter bowl,
A meaning in all things before unguessed,
And shapen in the stillness of the soul.

WHEN MUVVER CRIED

One time when I ist *wouldn't* mind,
An' had been very, very bad,
My muvver didn't say a word,
But looked at me so dreffful sad—

An' I ist pouted like I 'uz,
An' kicked my heels against the chair,
An' ist p'tended to myself
'At I 'uz glad an' didn't care!

I didn't look at her but at
The pattern on the nurs'ry wall,
An' I kept sayin' to myself:
"I'm bad, an' I don't care *at all!*"

I felt so stubborn all inside,
An' ist as cross as I could be,
An' swinged my feet an' waited for
Her to come there an' punish me.

The minutes they went by so slow
'At I got tired, an' by-an'-by
I peeked at her a little bit
Out of the corner of my eye.

An' 'en, oh, dear!—the stubborn there
On my inside, an' all the mad
'Uz gone so quick I wondered why
It *'uz* 'at I had been so bad.

An' I jumped down and runned to her
An' hugged an' kissed her, an' I said:
"Oh, muvver, I'm so sorry, an'
I ist most wish 'at I 'uz *dead!*

An' she laughed kind of shaky-like
An' stroked my hair an' kissed me nen,
An' I said "honest, *cross my heart*"
I never would do so again.

I've thinked about it ever since,
I can't forget it when I try—
My daddy says no gen'leman
Would ever make his muvver cry!

GOD

I followed it through Druid forests dim,
Through sunny vales and to the mountain height,
I saw it marching with the legioned waves,
I felt it in the mystery of night.

It flew before the rosy mists of day,
The vast winds caught and carried it along,
It trembled in the chalice of a rose,
I heard it in a linnet's matin song.

It looked from out a dumb brute's patient eyes,
It mounted on from star to paling star:
That glory which man has within himself,
But which he ever blindly seeks afar.

IN MARCH

I dreamed last night that it was spring,
And that I heard a robin sing,
And woke from sleep, at length to find,

The teasing fingers of the Wind,
Have piled the white drifts to my door
And sifted some upon the floor,
And all my window-pane is crossed
With fairy etchings of the frost.
I hear a creaking wagon go,
Complaining shrilly, through the snow;
I see a sky of leaden gray,
My neighbor says, "A bitter day."
I woke—ah, yes!—the trees are bare,
But there is something in the air.
No rain is dripping from the eaves,
But hush!—I hear the little leaves
Stir softly in their beds of bark,
And in their blankets in the dark,
The tiny baby seeds below,
Begin to turn and stretch and grow.

Then blow, O Wind, and Winter do
Your worst—my dream is coming true!

RAHAB

In the light of her sensuous glances,
In the web of her scented hair,
In the curve of her coral-budded breasts,
They dream—and they perish there.

Sweet flesh for their barter or buying,
Poor victim and lurer of men—

When the hot draft is drained and the goblet
Lies shattered, oh, Rahab, what then?

TRUTH

I bear my flaming torch before you,
But you hide your eyes from my light,
And guide your lives by the little, flickering candles
Of desire and delusion.
I unveil my glory to your sight,
But my nakedness affrights you,
And your evil minds make lewdness
Out of what is holy.
You would put out my torch if you might,
Even as you defile my sacred body.
Behold how I am rended,
How I am dragged through the slime in which you breed,
How I am offered up daily in sacrifice
To your unspeakable idolatries,
To your fetishes of prudery and convention.

Puny creatures of a day,
Disappearing, reappearing,
Working out your salvation through many lives,
Like moles burrowing blindly,
Sensing nothing higher than your clod of earth,
It is such as you who persecute and trample me.
Pompous little strutting men,

Oppressors, plunderers,
Selling souls for gain,
Making wars for greed—
It is such as you who insult my divinity.

Know you not that I am deathless:
That I rise triumphant from the dust
Of decayed civilizations,
And spring from the ashes of burned-out worlds?
Know you not that I was begotten of God,
Nourished in the womb of Eternity,
And came forth with the birth-pangs of Creation?
That my torch was lighted with the lighting of the stars,
And shall not be dimmed when they are quenched?

And so I go before you down the ages...
Naked Truth, bearing a torch.

WHEN DE HANTS IS OUT

Your caint tell me nuffin', fo' yo' ole uncle knows.—
Why else he been a-livin' all dis time, you spose?
Why, chile, when I wuz jes' a-wearin' baby cloes,
My mammy she had learned me dat on nights lak dese,
W'en somepin go a-wailin' thoo de elum trees,
An' de moon is hid, an' de rain a-comin' down,
Dat you bettah stay inside whar yo' safe an' soun'.

So, chile, you listen *to* me—what I says is true:
De Hants is awful hongry, an' a-waitin', too,
Fo' a little pickininny dat's as plump as you;
An' dey aint no question, an' dey aint a bit of doubt,
Dat dis berry, blessed evenin' all de Hants is out!

Fo' when de lightning flashes an' de thundah roa',
Den de Hants all stan' in a row by de doa',
Caze dey scent out a niggah every time fo' sho'.
An' dey stick dey long noses to de cracks an' smell,
An' if de dahkie 's fat dey am pleased mighty well.
An' dey all switch dey tails, an' dey all lick dey chops,
And de win' go Screech!—and de broken shuttah flops!
So, chile, you listen *to* me—what I says is true:
De Hants is awful hongry, an' a-waitin', too,
Fo' a little pickininny dat's as plump as you;
An' dey aint no question, an' dey aint a bit of doubt,
Dat dis berry, blessed evenin' all de Hants is out!

MIDSUMMER'S EVE

Gaunt as the ghastly tenements which they call home,
Fronting the squalor of the wretched street,
After the day's fierce heat is ended

They come forth from dim, ill-smelling halls,
From stuffy, cluttered rooms,
From stifling attics and loathsome cellars
Into the outer air.

They crowd the crazy stoops and crumbling stairs,
Overflowing the pavement and the oozing gutters edge:
Slouching, unshaven men,
Sallow, slattern women
With wispy hair caught back
From bleak, unlovely faces,
Suckling at inadequate breasts
Their latest born;
The aged with peering eyes and sagging lips,
And children with old features marked with doom.

Curses are heard and raucous cries,
A woman's shrill, sudden laughter,
The wail of a sick child,
The dry cackling of a senile voice,
A babe's complaint—
And coming nearer and nearer down the street
The whine of a hurdy-gurdy
Playing over and over
"I'm Always Blowing Bubbles"....

What do they know of the beauty
Of summer days and nights,
Housed within musty walls,
Bred in misery and schooled in wantonness,
Without a hope, an aspiration or a dream?
What do they know of the miracle of a waking world,
Of dew-gemmed sward and the lifted faces of flowers?
What do they know of leafy dells,
And the clear call of a bird to its mate—
Of water sparkling over pebbles,
Of wide, wind-swept spaces, sunny vales
And hoary peaks,
Of dawn and dusk and starlight and—God?...

But then, they have the pavements and the hurdy-gurdy.

PRESCIENCE

Today, beloved, when you came home I saw,
For the first time, some silver in your hair,
And that you stooped a little, and your face
Had lines I did not even dream were there.

When you had kissed me, smiling in my eyes,
I tried to smile—but suddenly there grew
A strange, cold numbness all about my heart...
And I could only weep and cling to you.

SONG

Life gave me wings today,
Swift, vibrant, tipped with fire,
Upon them I could soar
To dear lands of desire.

But we will walk instead,
My little Love and I—
'Tis better two should walk,
Than one, alone, should fly.

DEBT

'Twas not their love that held the life within me,
When half-content, I faintly strove with Death,
'Twas not the anguish of their faces lifted,
Their shaken breath—

It was not tear nor prayer of theirs that kept me:
It was a sudden flaming thought that thrilled
And moved my blood again—a promise given
And unfulfilled.

TRANSFIGURATION

Love was crucified...
We laid him
In the tomb,
But even as we mourned

He put on immortality,
And arose
And came unto us again
So glorified and radiant
That, questioning, we drew back—
Only by the pierced hands
We knew him.

OUT OF DEFEAT

Out of mysterious space
Wind voices come—
The night it has a cry
But my heart is dumb.

The stars are eyes that watch
Far overhead—
The night is a living thing
But my heart is dead.

THE FIELD

My heart is like a thirsty field
Denied the blessed rain,
Where withered in the furrow lies
The tender, budding grain.

Each morning to the rosy dawn
I look up hopefully,
For who can know but God, this day,
May send his rain to me.

DISILLUSION

I caught young Life against my breast,
Adorable, divine;
I cried, "I will not let you go
For you are mine."

At first I feared lest she might slip
Weary of me away,
But now I dread lest this changed thing
May choose to stay.

SEPTEMBER

And now comes sun-burned Autumn o'er the hills,
With trailing robes that sweep the fair green
things.
Crimsons and purples in her wake she brings—
Life leaps to color as her fancy wills.
Lavish of all her splendor, here she spills
A bit of scarlet, there a gold gleam flings;
The rusty steep to answering beauty springs,
Where through the drowsy hours the locust shrills.

Only the corn-field sere and withered stands,
Its tattered shadows woven carpet-wise,
A specter of the Summer, stark and pale,
Unglorified at Autumn's generous hands.
A-down its ragged rows a whisper sighs,

A sudden shadow, faint and chilly drear,
Falls on the hazy landscape like a veil.
In vague alarm the saplings bend to hear
The footsteps of the Winter drawing near.

SPRING

These are the days when hearts must feel
A stronger quickening,
For lighted on the foothills burn
The first green fires of Spring.

But some there are may never heed
The call of earth and skies,
But from the prison-house of life
Look forth with wistful eyes—

Far, far beyond the City's pave
Where beckon friendly trees,
And mountains veil their ancient scars
With pale anemones.

THE VAMPIRE

Upon one crying in the night I came,
A tiny, fretful thing without a name.
It clasped my neck, it lay upon my breast,
Its ceaseless wailing would not let me rest,
And cold its little head above my heart—
But could I bid so small a guest depart?

And there it clung and cried till worn and spent,
I bared my breast and gave it nourishment.
With vampire lips from hour to hour it drew
My very life-blood, and so fast it grew,
Ere morning broke, the candle on my shelf
Showed it of stature equal to myself.

For weary days I struggled to be free
Of that cold menace slowly throttling me.
At last I cried, "O, Fear! I know your name—
Begone into the darkness whence you came!"
It loosed its hold and this its feeble cry:
"Yea, when men name me boldly, then I die."

THIS IS ENOUGH

This is enough—to call you friend—to see
When at the long day's end I come to you
For comradeship and cheer as friends may do,
The light leap to your eyes because of me.

Warm palm to palm in greeting silently,
The close, strong clasp of unvoiced sympathy—
With perfect understanding words are few.

The pleasant room, the shabby chairs that woo
With wide, inviting arms; upon your knee
Some well-loved volume, thumbed and worn, that we
Have read together—fire-light and we two—
This is enough.

QUATRAIN

O Pine upon the mountain, that ever looks at God,
O Pine upon the mountain that sings with stars at night—
Sometimes I catch the vision, sometimes I hear the song.....
And all the Silence trembles, and all the hills grow white.

ON THE MOUNTAIN

Although it hides the mountains in its mist,
I can be patient with the rain to-day—
I know behind the curtain, shut away,
God works with gold and green and amethyst.

And next time that I take the trail I'll go
Half-fearful of a presence where I pass,
Half-shy of new leaves and of springing grass,
And valiant buds that push up through the snow.

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